

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L NIAMEY 1906

E.O. 11652: GDS

RTAGS: PINT OTRA NG
SUBJECT: DATT VISIT AND GON BAN ON DIPLOMATIC TRAVEL

REF: NIAMEY 1905

1. REFTEL REPORT CHIEF OF STATE KOUNTCHE'S DECISION NOT REPEAT NOT TO APPROVE INTERNAL TRAVEL WITHIN NIGER BY DATT AIRCRAFT WHICH HAD BEEN IN PLANNING STAGES FOR SOME TIME AND WHICH MFA HAD ORALLY APPROVED.

2. KOUNTCHE'S DECISION IS PERSONALLY IRRITATING, BECAUSE I HAD LOOKED FORWARD TO TRIP AS FIRST OPPORTUNITY TO SEE SOMETHING OF NIGER AND DROUGHT SITUATION IN CRITICAL TAHOUA-TCHIN-TABARADAN AREAS. BAN ON IN-COUNTRY TRAVEL BY DIPLOMATS ACCREDITED HERE ALSO IS INCONSISTENT WITH FRIENDLY RELATIONS WHICH WE ARE SUPPOSED TO HAVE WITH NIGER. HOWEVER, I DO NOT REPEAT NOT BELIEVE WE SHOULD MAKE ISSUE OF GON DECISION.

3. REASONS FOR KOUNTCHE'S ACTION ARE NOT CLEAR, ONE POSSIBLE EXPLANATION BEING CONCERN THAT VISIT OF THIS TYPE WOULD DIVERT LOCAL PERSONNEL FROM OTHER DUTIES. GON IS KNOWN TO BE TROUBLED ABOUT BURDENS IMPOSED ON LOCAL OFFICIALS BY VIP TRIPS, WELL-

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WISHERS, JOURNALISTS, ETC. AND KOUNTCHE MAY HAVE REGARDED OUR

TRIP IN THAT LIGHT. IN SUBMITTING REQUEST FOR FLIGHT CLEARANCE WE WERE IN EFFECT TESTING BAN ON DIPLOMATIC TRAVEL AND GAMBIT DID NOT SUCCEED. FRENCH AMBASSADOR TELLS ME THAT IN HIS CAPACITY AS DEAN HE HAS REPEATEDLY RAISED QUESTION OF TRAVEL WITH FOREIGN MINISTER AND OTHERS, POINTING OUT THAT SITUATION IN NIGER HAS RETURNED TO NORMAL AFTER COUP AND SPECIAL SECURITY MEASURES IMPOSED AT THAT TIME NO LONGER SEEM REQUIRED. FOREIGN MINISTER HAS REPORTEDLY AGREED AND PROMISED TO LIFT BAN, BUT KOUNTCHE HAS OVERRULED HIM.

4. IN ANY EVENT, WE DO NOT REPEAT NOT BELIEVE BAN IS AIMED AT US MISSION BECAUSE WE ARE, IN FACT, CARRYING ON NORMAL BUSINESS AND TRAVEL. GON HAS INTERPOSED NO OBJECTIONS TO TRAVEL BY PEACE CORPS STAFF AND AID PERSONNEL WHICH IN ALL CASES HAVE BEEN CLEARED IN ADVANCE WITH RELEVANT MINISTRIES. MOST NOTABLE TRIP OF THIS NATURE WAS AID OFFICE DIRECTOR SHEAR AND RDO BARON'S FLIGHT BY CHARTER AIRCRAFT ABOUT TWO WEEKS AGO FULL LENGTH OF COUNTRY FROM NIAMEY TO N'GUIGMI AND BACK WITH SEVERAL STOPS ALONG THE WAY. GON UNDERSTANDS NEED FOR THIS TYPE OF TRAVEL AND APPARENTLY IS WILLING TO DEFINE DIPLOMATIC TRAVEL BAN NARROWLY, LIMITING IT TO AMBASSADOR AND SENIOR DIPLOMATIC STAFF OF MISSION. THUS, MUCH OF OUR JOB IS GETTING DONE AND THERE IS NO NEED TO RAISE ISSUE WHICH MIGHT RESULT IN TIGHTER TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS.
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